

Natural Connections

Engaging communities to enhance urban
greenspaces

Progress in pictures – June 2017



Introduction

The “Engaging communities to enhance urban greenspaces” project is known locally as Natural Connections. In its final year the project has continued to build more momentum, reaching more people. It is having a real impact on the lives of the young people involved and is improving the greenspaces that surround them.

This report highlights some of the achievements in the last year and will be followed up with a full evaluation report in the autumn of 2017.



This report was written by Ian Mackenzie & Tracy Lambert, Scottish Wildlife Trust, June 2017

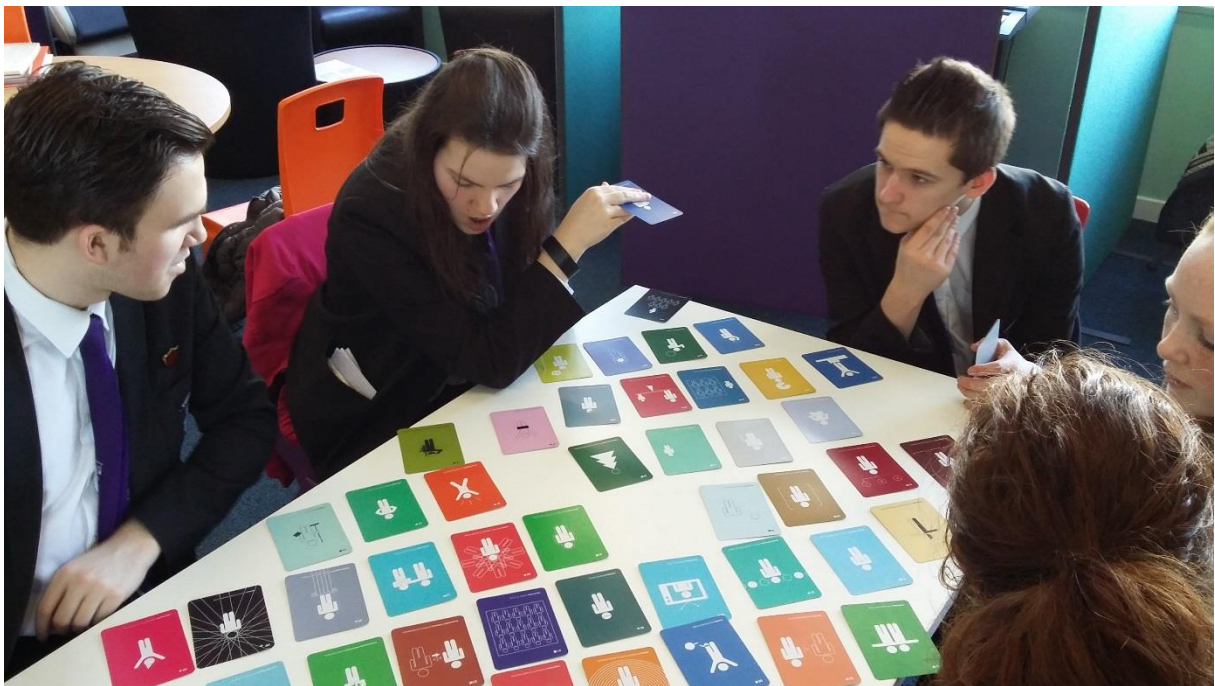
Photos (Top to Bottom): Ravenswood Local Nature Reserve; Guided walk in Cumbernauld Glen Wildlife Reserve; Living Window at St Maurice's Pond. Front page: Hallo"scream" in Cumbernauld Glen



Young people



Over 70 young people have taken part in the project. They have led the improvements on 3 of Cumbernauld's greenspaces and helped celebrate the town's amazing natural environment with events like Hallow"scream" in the Glen. Police Scotland youth volunteers brought a zombie vibe to the event attended by 210 people.



All four of the high schools in Cumbernauld have now taken part in the project. Each of them took part in a values session before and after the workshops. This was crucial in starting the conversations with young people about nature and their role in the town.



The practical sessions have helped deliver the community action plans and offered alternative learning experiences that have focused on employability and skills development. To date the young people have delivered 81 practical sessions on the wildlife sites adjacent to their schools.



The schools have valued the project and it has been recognised in OFSTED inspections and through an award nomination for community education.



Young people from Our Lady's High School gave up their own time when on study leave to come and plant holly at Ravenswood Local Nature Reserve

Community



The dilapidated wildlife garden at the entrance to Ravenswood Local Nature reserve was in need of an upgrade. Following a consultation with local residents, this area is being transformed with the help of volunteers and contractors.



Pop up events, including Lego photography, have proved popular and have been a great way to engage people. This opportunistic approach has meant we have been able to capitalise on good weather and be out and about when more people are. In 2016/17 the project has reached over 2,500 people at events.



Volunteer internships have been a key part of the project. 6 interns have helped us carry out specific surveys for invasive non-native plants and provided extra capacity for events. All of the trainees have gone onto further employment or training and the internships have been a great success.

National Volunteer Week



Thank you from the Cumbernauld Living Landscape



We have connected to other national campaigns to celebrate and promote the work of the Nature Ninjas Sunday volunteers. So far community volunteers have contributed 173 days to the project and we have run training sessions such as bat ID skills to improve their natural heritage knowledge.

Nature



Native trees such as holly and oak have been planted at the sites to enhance the wildlife habitats. This has given the young people involved the opportunity to learn practical skills whilst contributing to their community.



Habitats for pollinating insects such as the Ringlet (above) have been enhanced at St Maurice's Pond and Ravenswood LNR. The management of the meadows has been improved and bug hotels created in the wildlife garden area.



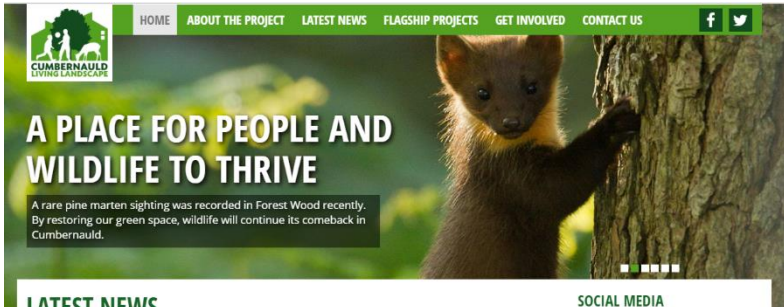
The understanding of the natural heritage of the sites has increased, with the first species list being compiled for all three sites. Young people from the schools involved have contributed to citizen science projects such as the OPAL Water Quality Survey to increase our knowledge of how polluted ponds and lakes are.



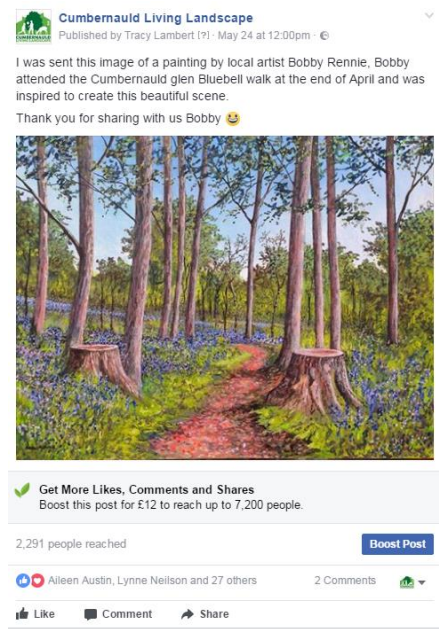
Removing Invasive Non Native Plant Species, such as *rhododendron ponticum*, from the wildlife sites has been a key activity of the project. This work is crucial to maintain and enhance the biodiversity of the sites and these tasks have been carried out by young people and weekend volunteers.

Getting the word out

The project has worked hard to get the word out as widely as possible through events, social media and a weekly column in the Cumbernauld News.



RECRUITING NOW!



Taking a walk on the wild side is reaping fitness benefits for conservation volunteers.
A group known as the Nature Ninjas has made twice their normal calories on projects with Scottish Wildlife Trust.

Once a month, the Cumbernauld Living Landscape volunteers work at three green spaces in the town. Each Nature Ninja has worn an activity tracker to record their steps taken and calories used during work on nature reserves and at public events.

Helpers on wildlife projects are burning off calories, walking miles and having fun as well as transforming their local environment.

Dala from the devils revealed they burn around 1800 calories and walk an average of six miles during conservation work – roughly double the calories used in a normal day at the office.

And volunteers at public events covered an average of 12,000 steps while helping to spread news about the Cumbernauld Living Landscape project to 6000 locals.

Nature Ninja Louise Smith praised the benefits of the conservation work.

She said: "The work is hard graft but fun and the physical exercise gives me a buzz and helps me to sleep really well afterwards."

"It's also great to be able to get outdoors and spend a few hours with amazing people in beautiful surroundings. Knowing you're making a difference for nature just adds to the overall experience."

The Cumbernauld Living Landscape is a long-term vision to transform the town's environment. The green spaces include St Maurice's Pond, Ravenswood Local Nature Reserve and Cumbernauld Glen Wildlife Reserve.

Volunteer work has included clearing non-native invasive species, maintaining paths to improve access and planting wildflowers and trees.

Tracy Lambert, the project's community engagement officer, said: "It's easy to forget about the physical and health benefits of volunteering but the evidence shows people who spend more time in nature are healthier, happier and more engaged with the environment."

"People are always surprised when they find out just how active they get when they come to help us improve their local nature reserves. And it's so much cheaper than a gym membership."

Paul Barclay is a natural networks officer with community volunteering charity TCV Scotland. He said: "The Cumbernauld Living Landscape project is a win-win for all."

"The hard work of the volunteers makes an incredible contribution to nature and Cumbernauld, plus the Nature Ninjas reap the benefits for their own good health."

Cumbernauld Living Landscape is a partnership project with nature conservation charity SWT, North Lanarkshire Council and Forestry Commission Scotland.

SWT receive financial support from a range of groups, including Scottish Natural Heritage and players of People's Postcode Lottery.

An SWT spokesman said: "The aim of the project and others like it is to reinforce and expand existing green networks and reconnect people to the natural environment."

For more info, see cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk, log on to scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/how-you-can-help/volunteer or visit www.tcv.org.uk/scotland

Getting fit is second nature to the Ninja volunteers



Join me on my adventures in Scotland's great outdoors by checking out my award-winning website at www.fionaoutdoors.co.uk – you'll find lots of great information about walking, cycling, running and other outdoor activities, as well as kit reviews.